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## MAGNOLIA ES AND GREENBELT MS WIN SCIENCE BOWL CHAMPIONSHIPS

**UPPER MARLBORO, MD** – Magnolia Elementary School and Greenbelt Middle School emerged as champions after winning their final rounds in the 2016 Science Bowl Competition. Both teams received plaques for every team member and one to display in their school, and all students received Audubon Field Guides.

"I am very proud of these winning teams," said Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer. "Students and coaches worked hard to get to the championship level, and have certainly demonstrated their mastery of science."

This year was a landmark year for Science Bowl, which celebrated its 30th season of providing a fun and exciting venue for students to shine in science. In the final rounds, Magnolia Elementary School celebrated its second win in the elementary division, and Greenbelt Middle School – a long-time competitor in the competition – won its first-ever championship.

In a dramatic finish on March 16, Magnolia edged out University Park, the reigning champion, by just five points, 210-205. It is Magnolia's second championship and its first since 2010. Coach Robert Allen prepared a winning team that included Keon Groves, Kobe Marshall, and Dustin Navarossa. Alternates included Briana Adams, Ababacar Diao, Taslim Raji, and Nkyron Hicks.

Greenbelt won the final round on April 5 with Martin L. King, Jr. with a final score of 255-180. The Greenbelt team included seventh-grader Alexander Swisdak, and eighth-graders Chidimma Njubuisi-Oluavu, Onome Efe-Aluebhosese, and alternate Ryan Mbuashu-Ndip. Santosh Gupta and Antoinette Glenn coached the team.

Science Bowl is the award-winning science quiz program of Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS), and is hosted by Dave Zahren, Senior Television Specialist. Competitions are taped live at the PGCPS Channel 96/38 studios in the Bonnie F. Johns Educational Media Center in Landover. More than 7,500 children have appeared on Science Bowl since its start in 1986. Science Bowl has also won numerous awards for outstanding children's programming, including the Telly and CableAce. You can watch the show on Channels 96 (Comcast) and 38 (Verizon) or on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/pgcps).



## GAMENEWS

# PGCPS celebrates three decades of The Science Bowl

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LANDOVER – A lot has changed in science in 30 years, but for Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS), The Science Bowl has been a constant.

It was the brainchild of Dave Zahren and Chuck Wolf and started off with simple categories. They kept score on a chalkboard.

“It was pretty bush league,” Zahren said. “But like all things, it evolved.”

With time the set became a little larger, a little more colorful, and technology was introduced. The game now has an electronic board, but the feel is still the same – it is still held together through Zahren’s passion for the game.



Growing up, Zahren loved watching Jeopardy! Through his career he spent time teaching, forecasting the weather as a TV weatherman, was a finalist in the Teacher in Space program during the Ronald Reagan Administration, and after that program he developed The Science Bowl with the superintendent of PGCPS in the 1980s.

"I always had the idea of doing a science show like Mr. Wizard, doing experiments. I said 'I'd like to do a game show too that's based on science.' So he sent me here and we developed it," Zahren said.

The bowl is filmed in a single room studio at the Bonnie F. Johnson Educational Media Center. The studio is also home to Count on Us, the school system's math help show. Three student interns run the cameras and a few judges control the electronic board and scores while a producer and Zahren man the entire process.

In fact, Zahren writes all of the questions for the show himself and memorizes them. That's 90 questions for every day of filming, which is most Tuesdays from September until April, three shows at a time. So, he is constantly "on the lookout" for question ideas.

"Maybe I'm the only person who still goes to see the animated movies like Zootopia," he said. "And I'm sitting there writing question ideas down, or there's stories about the Zika virus or the New Horizons spacecraft that went to Pluto. That was a godsend."

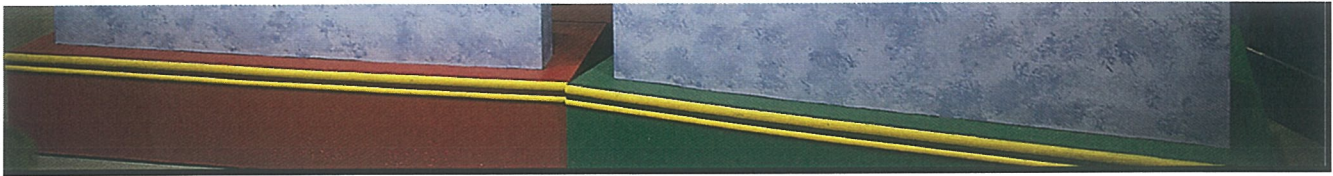
The larger idea, he said, is to not create a trivia bowl, but show students the science they are learning in the classroom is being used all around them, everyday. There is also a challenge in making questions that are difficult but answerable.

"It is trying to forget how old you are and trying to put yourself back in their time and their experiences," he said. "It didn't surprise me that they didn't know Jimmy Carter was behind the guinea worm."

Science has changed a lot in the 30 years he's been writing questions. He no longer asks about beakers and test tubes and scientists that have escaped memory and textbooks. Now he finds himself asking, still, about classics like Einstein and Marie Curie, but also about iPads, current movies and even Katy Perry.







The preparation is always ongoing, he said. Even now that the show is over for the school year, he is still working. He wrote questions for next season the morning of the finals and expects to have around five shows done by the end of summer.

The goal of the show is obviously education, but Zahren said the show has also become a family for the contestants, the coaches and for him. Zahren knows most of his returning contestants by name. Each time they visit they fill out a form about their career goals, their hobbies and things that interest them.

He starts each filming by asking them about themselves – their favorite thing they read that week, why they want to be a child physiologist or an anesthesiologist, and uses that information during the show for breaks between rounds. He said he likes learning about how they collect rocks and bugs or do at-home experiments.

Over the past 30 years he said he has watched students grow from their first ever participation in The Science Bowl in elementary school to their final round as eighth graders.

"We had a coach who was a contestant and then grew up and became a teacher and brought a team back, so it goes full circle," Zahren said. "After 30 years that happens."

He has also been a constant in the students' lives.

After Walker Mill Middle School lost in the semifinal round of The Science Bowl on April 5, Paris Smalley, an eighth grader, instantly wanted to know what the next step was. Where could she keep competing, what options were there for academic competition, and how could she help out with The Science Bowl in the future?

She started competing in fifth grade and kept coming back to the bowl for three years. She has gotten used to seeing Zahren, the judges and the other students over the years and said it is sad to be leaving, but she is thankful for the experience The Science Bowl gave her.

"Over the years I've kept coming back to The Science Bowl and I would see the same people, the same judges and I'd meet knew people, but every time I came back I felt welcomed," she said. "The first time I came, I was so nervous, I was a nervous wreck, but they're so encouraging, so supportive."

She said The Science Bowl is a place where she's felt comfortable being someone who loves learning and said it is a place where it's "okay to be smart."

"This is a great chance for them so show off a little bit," Zahren said. "Science is often times synonymous with nerdiness, but it's okay to be a nerd."

Greenbelt Middle School was rewarded for their science knowledge in The Science Bowl championship match. After defeating Hyattsville Middle in the semifinal round earlier in the day, Greenbelt topped Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle to win their first-ever championship title.

Alexander Swisdak, Chidimma Nbuluisi-Oluavu, Onome Efe-Aluebhosele and Ryan Mbuashu-Ndip competed hard against the other teams as they fought from behind to win their semifinal game. Then, the championship round with MLK Jr. started off close, but ended with Greenbelt winning by a large margin.



"I feel pretty awesome right now. We did something a whole bunch of people tried to do but couldn't do," Nubuisi-Oluavu said. "I mean, I tried to do it before and couldn't do it, and now, I've done it."

All four said winning the championship was a way of giving back to their advisor who couldn't make it because of an illness.

"For Dr. (Santosh) Gupta, who's done this for a long time but unfortunately was not able to be here, I definitely feel this is our way of giving back to him. Like 'thank you for everything you've done. Here are the fruits of your labor,'" Nubuisi-Oluavu said.



Candace is the Assistant Editor at The Prince George's Sentinel and covers education and the City of Hyattsville.

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